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ABSTRACT

The negative influences on children's development in war-torn Yugoslavia stimulated the development of The Good Will Classroom (GWC), an intervention program designed to promote tolerance, social responsiveness, assertiveness, and proactive behavior. This article describes the components and implementation of GWC, which is structured as experiential workshops that rely on children's everyday experiences relevant to selected themes. First, the general procedure of the workshops is discussed: a structured scenario (usually a game) evokes an individualized, "raw" personal experience; this individual experience is then communicated with others. Through this process, individual experience becomes conscious knowledge, generalized and integrated into an existing cognitive structure and thus applicable in other situations. Next, GWC's system, in terms of programs for various grade levels, is described, and an example workshop on peer group pressure for older elementary school children is presented. Finally, the article gives a brief description of GWC's three-volume manual, which is published only in Serbia. (EV)

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IS IT POSSIBLE TO IMPROVE TOLERANCE AMONG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN? THE GOOD WILL CLASSROOM EXAMPLE

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As an answer to the question in the title of this presentation, *The Good Will Classroom* has been developed by school psychologists of the Group MOST[1], as an intervention program aiming to improve tolerance among the school population in Serbia. The highly complex context in which children develop in this country is difficult to define, but at least schematically it could be outlined in terms of several most pronounced agents influencing the child's psychological development. Alongside the background of patriarchal and communist authoritarian mentality, new influence-bearing elements have emerged: the war and economic collapse, which strongly contribute to the totally unfavorable situation experienced by children.

It would take much more space than is available to explain the particular influences of all the listed elements of the context of child development. Research findings gathered during 1991-92 in Belgrade and other Serbian towns have already shown the effects in the behavior of preschool and school children[2], which only worsened in later years. In the everyday lives and

1 Group MOST is the association of school psychologists trained for mediation, negotiation and non-violent conflict resolution, a collective member of the Center for Antiwar Action. Address: Kralja Petra 46, 11000 Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

2 In the Serbian language published in: *Psiholoska istrazivanja* no 6 (Belgrade: Institut for Psychology, University of Belgrade). It contains articles on children conceptions of the war (Vesna Ognjenovic), on the preschool teachers' competences in dealing with new children's experiences (Smiljka Ivackovic), on the presence of the war in school children everyday lives

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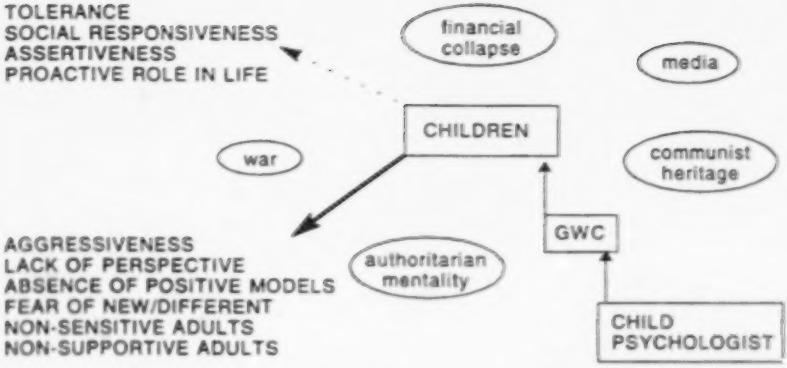

activities of the children it is evident that the war is present as an experience of threat, pain, fear, loss - hard to cope with, to understand or explain. The financial collapse of the country adds a devastated environment (with a lack of smiles, warmth, books, toys, even proper food), and almost the only available media - TV - just highlights further the unfavorable influences. The combined effects of the listed agents on child behavior could be summarized as supporting tendencies to higher aggressiveness, lack of perspective, absence of positive models and fear of new/different/change in children growing up with presently not-sensitive-enough, not-supportive-enough adults.

The strategy

The change we want to introduce with the intervention program called *The Good Will Classroom (GWC)*, and thus break this vicious circle, aims at the promotion and support of tolerance, social responsiveness, assertiveness and a proactive role in life. These general aims of the GWC program are more precisely defined as the promotion of the following program's target areas (see diagram 2): self-awareness and self-reflection, communication skills, personal strategies in favor of socially responsive behavior, and the change of attitudes toward conflicts.

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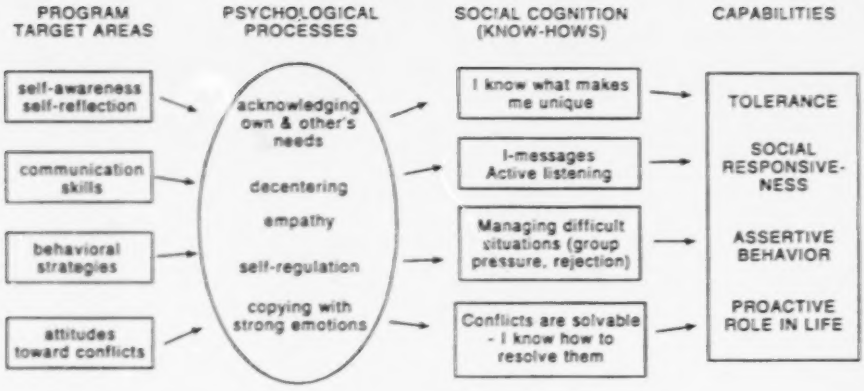
and activities (Nada Korac), and on the adaptation of the refugee children to the new school setting (Danijela Petrovic). The overview of these results can be seen in English in: Ruzica Rosandic. "The Legacy of War and Children". NIRA Review (Japan). Special issue: Summer 1995, pp. 46-49.



In order to elevate these target areas to the level of social knowledge, in order to transform them into "know-how" behavioral tools, and finally into personal capabilities, we consider it necessary to elaborate them indirectly, via certain relevant psychological processes. In the above diagram these processes are listed within the circle. Our strategy for achieving such a transformation was to improve the processes of cognitive and socio-emotional decentering, self-regulatory processes, acknowledgement of one's own and others' needs, empathy, and coping with strong emotions such as hate, rage, fear or pain.

The general form of intervention was the *experiential workshop*. With the term "experiential", used in similar programs[3], we stress the fact that the contents of this type of educational workshops rely on children's everyday experience relevant to the selected themes. For example, GWC largely concentrates on developing and improving the ability to decenter. So, in many workshops children can experience and exchange experiences from different everyday situations where they have to put themselves "into other's shoes", to acknowledge other's needs, emotions, attitudes. For example, children make pairs, and one in a pair child A gets a note on which is written what he/she did to the other child B; it can be something pleasant ("You shared your chocolate with your pair"), or unpleasant ("By accident you spilled water on your pair's drawing"). Child A has the task of making a "sculpture" of child B, which expresses the feelings of B provoked by what A did to him/her (of course, the "sculptured" child does not know in advance

3 For example: Kinshasha Nia-Azariah, Frances Kern-Ctotty, Louise Gomer Bangel (1992). A Year of SCRC: 35 Experiential Workshops for Classroom. Cincinnati, Oh: Center for Peace Education.

what he/she is supposed to express). After that, the note is read aloud, and B can make necessary changes in his/her own posture, and exchange that experience with his/her pair (and with other children in the group, too).

Through such contents of relevant everyday experience a child can acknowledge what makes him/her different from and similar to others concerning preferences, habits, abilities, feelings. In this way, he/she gets an insight into different levels and kinds of similarities and dissimilarities among persons, which are the grounds of individuality. The possibility to experience the individuality of another person helps a child become more conscious of his/her own individuality. For example, a child is gradually involved into situations in which she/he can see what she/he has in common with other children, what makes her/him different, in order to acknowledge it and verbally express it: "Like Marko, I prefer winter of all the seasons, but we are different because Marko likes math, and I do not, and in that I am similar to Jasna..."

In a corresponding way children simulate typical conflict situations, which help them to experience the emotions and needs of different persons involved in conflict. For example, the instructor reads some well-known story to the children (e.s. "Snow White"), but not in the usual manner: the known story is told from the standpoints of other persons - the stepmother's, the two step-sisters', the father's... The basic idea of such an experience is to make children look for the differences in the experiences of different actors in the same situation, to acknowledge that one solution to some problem could not be equally satisfying to all the involved parties. Or, on the same theme of conflicts, the work is organized so that pairs of children get only a partially drawn and textless comic-strip about two children in a quarrel, and they have to finish it, drawing the starting scene and the final one, as well as to write down in the "clouds" what the actors are saying to each other aloud and what they think/feel "in themselves". This helps children realize the uneasiness of the incongruence of overt and covert behavior. Further, it helps them acknowledge the different interests, feelings, attitudes arising from the dynamics of the conflict and of its various outcomes; this helps them become able and willing to *redefine* a conflict situation (to stop looking at it as a non choice situation) and look for a solution which could satisfy both conflicting sides.

Such workshops also support the child's empathy and help the articulation of the "language of needs". The same theme of conflicts can be worked out in the form of role play, so that an unfinished story (about a child wanting to watch cartoons on TV, and the mother wanting to go with her child to visit friends, for example) is presented to the children, and they are supposed to finish it, adding other possible roles, and play it out in small groups. Such activities are followed by group discussions where children share experiences encountered through the workshops, and the instructor helps them articulate the important topics.

The procedure

In our opinion, the workshop format is the most appropriate form of inducing and promoting the social knowledge and skills to which the GWC program is oriented. The basic outline used in the workshops is already explained in this volume[4]. As a starting point, it has a structured scenario which helps channel the individual engagement of the participants. The scenario consists of structured activities for the participants (usually games), which the instructor introduces as a concrete demand ("Now, let us draw /that and that", "Think carefully and then say...", "Remember some situations when you..."). This is followed by personal experience provoked by the relevant content of the scenario. This experience is individual and intensive, because it is relevant and emotional. It is the basic "raw stuff" enriched through the process of the workshop, and thus transformed into insight and knowledge. The experience would stay raw, un-articulated, non-communicable, if there was not a demand to express it through some symbolic means: a word, a drawing or a movement. So, giving a form to an experience is the step following the demand and the provoked experience. Then, the formed experience is shared with other participants. Sharing, communication with other participants, is the most fruitful way to acknowledge and enrich one's own experience. It has two functions: (a) by expressing one's own experience and explaining it to others, one becomes a bit more aware of the experience and of the way it influences one's behavior; (b) others' experiences enrich our own experience, help us to see it from different angles, especially if connected with various (especially unpleasant) situations. They help the articulation and elaboration of one's own experience, its processing and the insight.

Through such a process, an individual experience becomes conscious knowledge, generalized and integrated into an existing cognitive structure, and thus applicable in other situations ("I understand what my experience means, I know what am I supposed to do when I feel like that and I know how to apply it in new situations"). The whole process helps an experience to be transformed, following the routes from internal to external, from isolated to integrated, from unarticulated to communicable, and thus becoming knowledge applicable in other situations, or at least psychologically available whenever the content becomes relevant, entering into competition with alternative considerations.

The educational workshops used in this program are clearly an active form of learning, and a form of experiential learning. The GWC program stresses the importance of articulation, elaboration and culturally formed knowledge or, as S. Jankovic and T. Kovac-Cerovic call it, "the cultivation of an individual,

4 See the text by T. Kovac-Cerovic, "How can we as parents and educators foster metacognitive Development?"

spontaneous experience through group exchange"[5]. The workshops used in the GWC program recognize the importance of learning through social interaction within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky), and the corresponding forms of cooperative learning. As an important form of learning societal behavior, the GWC program also recognizes the importance of learning from a model: the way an instructor treats and accepts different opinions, expresses disagreement, reacts to the conflicts within the group etc., becomes model behavior for similar communication with the due respect for one's own and others' needs. Bearing in mind that play is the basic form of activities in the GWC workshops, it should not be necessary to point out that a characteristic combination of divergent and convergent ways of thinking is embedded in the system, too.

In the GWC program different forms of work with children are used, like: simultaneous individual activity, work in pairs or in small groups, work with the whole group (the whole school class of approximately 30 pupils), as well as different forms of activities/expressions: drawing or painting, singing, dancing, motor movements, "sculpturing", role-playing, acting, group discussions, playing introductory and finishing games...

The system

The GWC program is a system of three sub-programs adapted for various ages of school children: (a) for younger (grades 1-4) and (b) older (grades 5-8) elementary school children, and (c) for high school students. Each program has 8-15 workshops (lasting 90 minutes) with the same thematic structure, but adapted to different ages.

The age of the pupils defines the way particular topics are elaborated and the workshops organized. Some aspects of the workshops have to be adapted according to age differences with great care; these are: the content (theme) of the workshop, play context, the character of the demands posed to the children, the dynamics and the organization of the activities, as well as the kind of materials used. Also, the sequences through which a certain theme is elaborated have to be suitable for participants of different ages: for younger participants some themes have to be sequenced into smaller units, and for older ones they can be elaborated within bigger units and on more general levels. For example, for younger pupils the conflicts have to be elaborated through many small steps: it is necessary to work on the concept of needs, then obstacles, possible helpers and so on. For older ones all that can be elaborated within one workshop. Also, for younger children symbolic

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5 S. Jankovic, T. Kovac-Cerovic. "Basic assumptions of the workshops" in: *The Good Will Classroom - an introductory volume of the Manual* (published in Serbian).

play is the most appropriate form of activity, and for older ones other forms can also be used. Or, since the dynamics of a workshop are mostly conditioned by the degree and the quality of the attention span of the children, and their ability to concentrate, they too have to be adapted to the age differences. Besides, for younger children the forms of activities have to be varied, with frequent breaks consisting of motor activities, and for the older ones the whole workshop can consist of only one kind of activity.

As already stressed, the themes of the sub-program's workshops are built one upon the other, following the same schedule. In that sense, each sub-program looks like a closed system. But, this does not mean that the whole GWC program is a closed system. If the basic principles of the program are followed, particular workshops can be changed and adapted to the particular situations of implementation. The detailed instructions given in the manual for implementation of the GWC program help users - the teachers, school psychologists and pedagogues, or others working with the school children, to introduce such changes.

An example

The GWC program has a rather complex structure, not easy to explain on a few pages, and it would probably be a good form of introduction to present just one workshop as an illustration. The selected one is from the sub-program for older elementary school children:

They persuaded me

The aim: *This workshop is designed to help pupils acknowledge the mechanisms of social influence on an individual and her/his behaviour. A special focus is on the power of the peer group as an agent of socialization, and on the phenomenon of group pressure. Children can get an insight into the reasons for the resistance to group pressure and the need for accepting responsibility for one's own deeds, or reconsidering the consequences of one's own decisions.*

The process *of reaching these aims starts with an outline of possible social influences on an individual. The discussion is opened with the help of a poster with a drawing of a marionette, and the question: "Who influences me and my behavior?" Facilitated by the instructor, children discuss what are the "models" for their behavior and what are the forms of social influences. The problem of peer group pressure is opened with the story "They persuaded me", which initiates the processes of identification and decentration. Within a framework close to their everyday lives, the content of the story enables children to test various skills of resistance to group pressure, to*

acknowledge a need to rely on oneself and one's own interests, and to try to say "No" to the group in a potentially risky situation, and suggest another, "safer" solution.

Material

- *The poster with a marionette (make a copy of the poster from the supplement 8.1).*
- *Lists with questions for each group (supplement 8.2).*

Introductory activity

THE POSTER *10'*

The Instructor puts the poster on the board. Imagine that you are here instead of this marionette. What do you think, who is making her move, who is holding the threads? Who is influencing you and your acts, your behavior from the outside? The instructor asks for each of the pronounced agents: Why do you think so? In which way, how does (that) influence our behavior?

The Children suggest various sources of social influence, and the instructor, or someone among the children, writes them down within the drawn "clouds" connected to the marionette. The instructor stimulates the discussion (Is there somebody else who influences our behavior?).

If the children omit some important agents, for example media, ideas, peers, the instructor mentions them.

Are all the influences equally powerful? Which among these is the most powerful, and which is the weakest?

Are there any different opinions?

Can you yourself reach a decision which influence to accept and which not to accept?

For which of these influences can you by yourself reach the decision to accept it or not?

Are there any other opinions?

What do you think about the influence of your peers? Can you resist them or not?

The theme of this workshop will be just that one: the influences of the peer group.

Main activity

THEY PERSUADED ME	*75'*
Steps:	
1. Division into groups and listening to the story	*5'*
2. Discussion within small groups	*10'*
3. Reports from the small groups	*20'*
4. If I was in Shone's shoes, I would...	*20'*
5. Looking for a solution in similar situations	*20'*

1. DIVISION INTO GROUPS AND LISTENING TO THE STORY.

According to their own will, children form groups of 5-6. *I will read you a story about something which could happen to any of us. After that, each group will get a task relevant to the story. Listen carefully. The title of the story is, "They have persuaded me".*

It was a hot summer afternoon. Shone was sitting in front of the building, on the stairs of his entrance. He was alone and did not know what to do. - "God knows, where are the others? What happened to these men? Not a soul around!" Suddenly, Blacky and Kisa appeared.

"Shone, brother, what are you doing?" asks Blacky.

"Nothing. I'm bored to death. Do you have any ideas what to do?" says Shone.

"Let's go to the school yard to see what's on there", suggests Kisa.

They walked to the school, and nobody was there.

"Well, let's make some fun, men... Let's break a door down and cause some chaos inside..." Blacky suggests.

Shone hesitated. He was not sure whether he wanted to do something like that or not. "Well, I'm not sure... What if they catch us, it could be tough. ... The police could come..."

"Look, nobody could get us, what's with you, man? Don't behave like a cissy! Don't panic!" Kisa says convincingly. "Besides, we will not overdo it... Just a bit of fun.."

"Oh, well, let's do it," Shone says not quite sure. He was not delighted with the plan, but he wanted to be with his pals.

And so, while they were "tidying up" professor Markovic's chemistry cabinet, removing the bulbs, writing graffiti on the walls, turning the books upside down, the watchman suddenly appeared, called the police and their

parents. When Shone's parents asked him why he did it, he answered: "They have persuaded me!"

2. DISCUSSION WITHIN SMALL GROUPS.

And now, each group will get a list with questions relevant to the story. Try to put yourself into the positions of the actors of the story. Your task is to discuss the listed questions and, as a group, to offer answers. You have 10' for that. Afterwards, each group will present the opinion they have come up with.

The questions from the supplement are given to each group.
(How will professor Markovic feel when entering her cabinet?
What do you think, what will she do when she sees such chaos?
What do you think, how will Blacky and Kisa explain what they did?
What was Shone was thinking and how did he feel after all that was done?)

3. REPORTS FROM SMALL GROUPS.

The instructor asks each group to present their opinion. The answers to each question are presented one by one.

It is important to connect the offered answers, to weigh up each of the consequences which the actors of the story did not take into consideration before their adventure.

When the reports are finished, the whole class discusses the following questions:

What do you think, why did Shone accept his friends' suggestion?
What had influenced his decision, what was he afraid of?

The discussion should be channeled to the question of Shone's needs and fears. The expectation is that the children will realize that Shone agreed to participate because he wanted to show his friends his devotion, at the same time being afraid that they would ridicule him and call him a cissy.

4. IF I WAS IN SHONE'S SHOES, I WOULD...

We will try to see now what Shone could have done in this situation in order to reject his friends' suggestion, and at the same time keep good relations with them. I will stand in the middle of the circle, and act as Blacky and Kisa. Let each of you imagine that he or she is Shone. Let's support Shone a bit. Maybe he was not in a situation with no other outcome. Let's think what Shone could say to his friends while staying as close as possible to what he really wanted. How could he reject Blacky's and Kisa's suggestion, and stay

on good terms with them at the same time? I am sure that there are many good ways Shone could approach his friends.

The instructor has to accept each of the offered approaches. For example, she/he could say: It's O.K. if you think so... It is good. You have been very persuasive... Beside, the instructor should not evaluate the suggestions as good or bad; it is necessary to accept all the offered solutions.

At the end, when all children have said what they have to say, the instructor summarizes the suggested strategies, classifying all similar ones into corresponding categories (for example, an evade-lie-strategy; persuasion-strategy; another-suggestion-strategy...)

5. LOOKING FOR A SOLUTION IN A SIMILAR SITUATION.

Children make groups of 3, according to the order of sitting in the circle. Now, the task for each group is to recall the situations when you have not rejected some suggestions of your peer group. Let them be only those situations after which you felt uneasy because you had accepted the suggestion. Then, together, think about the possible ways of rejecting the suggestion in such a situation, what else could have been said, how one could respect one's own needs and at the same time not offend a friend... You have 10' minutes for that, and then, each group will present the chosen situation and the accepted solution.

After each group's report, the instructor asks all the other children what is their impression and whether somebody has some other suggestion.

Finishing activity

1. HOW MUCH IT TOUCHED ME *5'*

Draw on the board three concentric circles. Each child draws a sign of his/her own (dot, star, or something else) in the segment which corresponds to how much he/she was touched in this workshop, the central circle representing the strongest impression.

The manual

The GWC program has been tested and evaluated during the last two years in different school settings (in different kinds of schools: urban - rural, of

general type - specialized) and under various conditions (workshops with the whole class (ca 30 pupils) or with classes divided into two groups. The authors of the program are numerous: 15 of them participated in its creation and development from the first ideas to the final page of the manual, which is the end-product of this project. This presentation of the GWC project will end with a short description of the manual's content, for it is published only in Serbia, and is thus not accessible to a wider professional audience.

The manual is published in three volumes. The first, an introductory one, contains articles with the most important information relevant for implementing the program. It contains an analysis of the nature, origin, sequences, dynamics and possible outcomes of conflicts. Besides the most important common characteristics of the conflicts, the conflicts' structures and usual types of behavior in conflicts are outlined[6]. This text is followed by a presentation of the basic assumptions of conflict resolution intervention programs[7] and an explanation of the developmental-psychological bases of the GWC program[8]. It is pointed out which abilities and characteristics are relevant to behavior in conflict situations, and what are the ways to improve them. Also, an important task was to explain into detail the basic assumptions of experiential workshops, with all necessary instructions to the future instructors[9].

Like the authors of similar programs, we do not expect our program to influence only the development of the target social knowledge and skills necessary for constructive conflict resolution, but we do expect that thanks to this program the involved pupils will apply and transmit that knowledge out of our workshops, to others - to their peers or family members. That's why the problems of evaluation of similar programs are opened and possible subjects of evaluation outlined[10]. This analysis offers an overview of the most frequently used indicators of the expected changes and an explanation of the ways of accessing and comparing them. This is followed by some extremely valuable personal experiences from working with groups, and explanations of how to keep the workshop's dynamics, how to define, follow and change the rules of the group work, how to react to certain typical situations, and how to cope with conflicts in the group[11]. At the end of this introductory volume there is a Catalogue of the 97 games used in the GWC workshops as introductory or finishing activities[12].

The second and the third volumes present the sub-programs. Each sub-program presentation contains the detailed description of the workshops

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6 By Tünde Kovac-Cerovic.
7 By Diana Plut.
8 By Ruzica Rosandic and Nada Korac.
9 By Slobodanka Jankovic and Tünde Kovac-Cerovic.
10 By Dragan Popadic.
11 By Snjezana Mrse.
12 By Suncica Macura-Milovanovic.

and all necessary instructions for the instructors. In order to make clear that this paper is based on the contributions of the many authors of the GWC program, with whom all eventual compliments and criticisms blames have to be shared, let me finish it by listing their names. The authors of the sub-program for younger elementary school pupils are: Ruzica Rosandic, Slobodanka Jankovic, Nada Korac and Marina Jankovic; for the older elementary school pupils: Svetlana Kijevcanin, Suncica Macura-Milovanovic, Marija Krivacic, Slobodanka Jankovic and Maja Radojevic; and for secondary school students: Dragana Ilic, Milena Jerotijevic, Danijela Petrovic and Dragan Popadic.